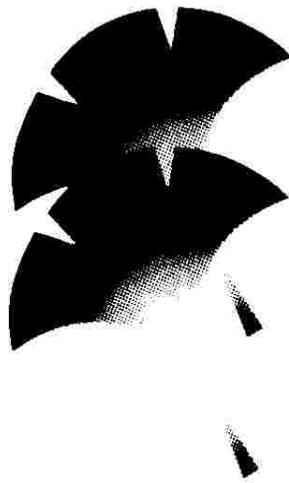


DEUTSCHES INSTITUT FÜR JAPANSTUDIEN



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**Doors wide shut?
The current discourse on labor migration
to Japan**

Working Paper 06/3

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Abstract:

Doors wide shut? The current discourse on labor migration to Japan

Does Japan need labor migration? The current public and political discourse on this issue juxtaposes two alternatives: It seems Japan must choose between either saving the national economy from the negative impacts of an ever shrinking workforce, a function of recent demographic changes in the country, or preventing foreign crime and international terrorism from occurring within its national boundaries. In other words, the debate revolves primarily around two issues: First, is labor migration to Japan a national security issue? Second, should labor migration to Japan include unskilled workers or be limited to a smaller scale migration composed exclusively of skilled professionals?

This working paper maps the positions of the following four actors in the current discourse: the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Japan's business federation (*Nippon Keidanren*) and the United Nations (UN). I argue that the traditional rivalry between political and economical elites on the one side vs. international organizations and non-state actors on the other breaks down with regard to the issue of labor migration. Instead, there is a possibility for new forms of coalition building among interest groups. Further research on this topic will evaluate what kind of impact this development will have on the structure of interdependence between state- and non-state-actors in Japan's political system.

Key words: labor migration; documented / undocumented foreigners; skilled / unskilled workers; public security; transnationalization; multi-level politics.

1. Introduction

This working paper introduces the preliminary results of my continuing research on the issue of labor migration to Japan. The paper's goal is to identify and classify actors in the current political (and to some degree also the public) discourse on the topic. Four actors have been selected for this study: two government agencies, namely the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Japan's business federation, the *Nippon Keidanren*; and the United Nations, here represented by the United Nations Population Division and the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights. Civil society organizations, in Japan as well as elsewhere, are another important actor in shaping the current discourse on labor migration to Japan, but they will be the subject of a separate in-depth study. This paper will highlight two decisive issues: First, we will trace the actors' opinions on whether border-crossing labor migration to Japan should be restricted to the skilled workforce or, alternatively, also be opened to unskilled labor. The second issue is whether the above named actors perceive labor migration to Japan to be a matter of national security.

The following section will address the question of why labor migration to Japan is once again a hot issue after it had been popular in the 1980s and then temporarily disappeared from the political agenda. In section three I will introduce my research methodology for this study, which is part of a larger research project currently underway. Section four provides a picture of the current discourse by mapping the positions of the four actors named above according to their take on the two topics of skilled/unskilled labor migration and foreign workers as a security issue. The final section will summarize my preliminary findings and suggest some directions for future research. I welcome any comments on how to proceed with this project, particularly suggestions on my research methodology. Thank you for taking the time to read this working paper.

2. Background on the Issue

In my interviews, both with officials involved in forming new policies regarding labor migration and with non-state actors involved in shaping the life realities of foreign workers in Japan, I would sooner or later ask the question: why do you think labor migration is such a hot topic again? The answers I usually get include Japan's demographic change; the growing economic need for cheap labor; the latest benchmark number of 200,000 visa overstayers having been topped; and Japan's ongoing internationalization — which certainly show a glimpse of what might be ahead. I have not gathered empirical data on how many actors of which group (political, economic or social) tend to name which reason(s), and I am not sure such a study would be very revealing. The reasons given by the various actors involved seem interwoven with each other to a large degree; in any case, the discourse on the topic of labor migration tends to cross the traditional boundaries between political and economical elites on the one side vs. non-state actors and international organizations on the other.

Based on the abovementioned reasons and current media coverage on the topic, I argue that there are currently two main issues within the discourse on labor migration to Japan: First, due to Japan's aging society, which is leading to a shrinking workforce, it is clear that the requirements of the nation's job market will not be met in the near future. Certain sectors, such as the service sector, in particular caretaking services for the elderly and infirm, will soon need more workers than Japan's job market will be able to provide. More in-depth empirical research must be conducted on this topic, but I think it is fair to assume that if no significant changes in other demographic factors (such as raising the retirement age) are implemented in the near future, there will be (and already is) an economic need for labor migration to Japan. Secondly, a growing internationalization of Japan's society (*kokusaika*) is underway. The numbers of foreigners residing in Japan — documented or undocumented — are rising, although slowly. Public perception of this development is split between a longing for Japan to become a real global player and part of

the international community on the one hand, and a persistent xenophobia on the other, encouraged by recent world events. One cannot avoid being confronted with the catchphrase “foreigner crime” (*gaikokujin hanzai*) when doing research on labor migration to Japan. In a post-9/11 world it seems especially easy for the political elite to implement measures that restrict the life and work of foreigners, be they mere tourists or long-term residents. With a public under the impression of rising numbers in “foreigner crimes” – although, as sociologist Ryoko Yamamoto has shown, this supposed increase results merely from a change in interpretation of the relevant statistics (2004: 27–57) – a political climate is shaped which enables the implementation of, for example, the latest amendment to the *Nyūkanhō* [Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act].¹ Among other things, this latest amendment will require foreigners to be fingerprinted upon entering Japan.

Both factors: the growing need for labor migrants due to Japan’s demographic development, and a growing fear of foreigners being criminals – a fear recently fed by several child murders by foreigners – lead to a peculiar atmosphere in which to be debating the revision of immigration guidelines to Japan. Iguchi Yasushi, scholar and former bureaucrat in the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, juxtaposes the current discourse on labor migration to Japan with that of the 1980s; he concludes that the current discourse has more of a sense of *kikikan*, a feeling of crisis (Iguchi 2001: 44). Such a discourse, within what is a real or perceived crisis might potentially expose to the public some insight into the political actors’ ‘real’ intentions. In an atmosphere of crisis, policies that would be hard to implement otherwise might be accepted if they are couched in terms of national security (or public safety). In section four of this paper I will offer a glimpse of the current political discourse on labor migration, which is clearly influenced by this “crisis” atmosphere. I will try to characterize two main issues of this discourse. First, how many foreign workers will be needed, i.e. will unskilled workers be needed, too, or will labor migration of the highly skilled suffice to compensate for Japan’s shrinking workforce?

¹ The law’s full name reads *Shutsunyūkoku kanri oyobi nanmin ninteihō*. It can be accessed on the Ministry of Justice’s website at: <http://www.moj.go.jp/NYUKAN/NYUKANHO/ho01.html> .

Secondly, is labor migration to Japan a threat to Japan's national security? (Or can labor migration, on the contrary, strengthen the ongoing process of *kokusaika*, thus paving the way for a more open and multicultural society in Japan?)

3. Research Methodology

Since this working paper is but a first step towards a larger research project, I will first explain what kind of research has been conducted up to this point, and what might deserve further study. It is in this area that I am hoping for your comments.

So far, I have collected data through the qualitative content analysis of various documents and through semi-structured interviews. I have conducted interviews with politicians and bureaucrats in the field, as well as with academics and civil society actors. Some of them have proven very valuable for gaining insight into how the various actors interact to shape new immigration guidelines, i.e. into the structures of political interdependence among the actors questioned. My qualitative content analysis has been focused on documents issued by government agencies, business federations, international organizations, and civil society organizations (CSO). My preliminary research results on the CSO sector are not included in this working paper. To be introduced in a separate study is how CSO engagement in the field of labor migration might be able to impact not only the content of the discourse surrounding the issue, but also reshape the structure of political interdependence between state- and non-state-actors. My content analysis also included research on which information is being made available by government agencies (and again by CSOs), and in which language(s) they are accessible, with language being a crucial aspect when dealing with an international audience. So far I have allowed my research categories to emerge out of the data I was analyzing.

I intend to continue following this two-line research approach of qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews. However, further data collection is necessary to grasp not only a more complete picture of the ongoing debate on labor migration to Japan, but also to set this picture in a larger research frame. In order to do so, I intend to expand my research methods to include quantitative data analysis of demographic changes, particularly of statistical trends in the labor market (sector by sector), and of media coverage on these issues. Furthermore, quantitative analysis of data such as meeting records of the legal advisory committees (*hōmu-iinkai*) in the Upper and Lower House, as well as qualitative analysis of publications by political parties, will surely reveal which labor migration issues are perceived to be the most pressing ones. Finally, to some degree – a degree which may not satisfy a trained anthropologist – I intend to use methods of participant observation in order to gain some experience of what it is like to live and work in Japan as a foreigner. I plan to do this by observing hands-on activism and/or political lobbying conducted by CSOs engaged in improving these very circumstances.

My larger research project aims at understanding (potential) labor migration to Japan on multiple levels, politically and structurally. Using migration systems theory, I will focus on both macro and micro structures. Analyzing macro structures generally deals with migration from a global perspective, i.e. against the background of the world economy, international relations and legal frameworks. The micro-structure level focuses on social networks among migrants. I aim to combine these two structural approaches by defining and studying selected analytical criteria, which allows me to focus on how demographic change in industrialized nations can affect labor migration . Similarly, a multi-level political approach includes political decision-making processes not only on an international or national level, but also on the local and non-governmental levels. Of special interest to this study are the changes to the structure of interdependence among Japanese political actors that will occur in the wake of labor migration to Japan .

The dimension of transnationalism, which often becomes the center of focus when studying the politics and structures of current migration movements, may very well also be of particular importance to my research project. Migration theory has already coined the term *transmigrant*, referring to “people whose existence is shaped through participation in transnational communities based on migration” (Castells and Miller 2003: 30). While *transmigrants* are by no means the majority of migrants at this point, or even a large minority, their numbers are increasing – a fact that hints at future migration patterns. Transnationalism in political science is currently debated predominantly in such as social movement literature. Looking at CSO activism in a transnational context, I believe, seems to pave the way for showing the true power of CSOs within the domestic structures of political interdependence. My research on this point will draw from Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) “Boomerang Pattern” concept, which argues that transnational alliance building provides increasingly influential ways of activism to CSOs in states with restricted political opportunity structures.

There are two research questions at the center of my larger research project. One question deals explicitly with the phenomenon of potential labor migration to Japan. According to the push-pull-model of migration (i.e. migration occurs when there are strong “pushing” and “pulling” incentives, such as labor market vacancies, level of wages etc. for potential migrants in two or more countries), a natural labor migration flow to Japan, especially from countries in Southeast Asia, should occur. However, it does not. So the riddle is: Which interest groups in Japan (in politics, economy, and society) block this migration from happening? Or stated differently, what kind of model of labor migration to Japan (if any) might find a political consensus, be backed by society and at the same time make sense economically? My second question is directed towards developments within Japanese politics. Border-crossing migration is a transnational topic per se. With their increasing transnational activity, CSOs could gain more influence on the political decision-making process even in so-called strong states; CSO engaged in migration issues are bound to be at the forefront of these very structural and political changes. Have there been changes

in how CSOs position themselves within the interdependent structures of Japanese politics? Where do these changes lead? With this research project I aim to contribute some insights into structures of migration to Japan, and into the changing patterns of multi-level politics in that country. The working paper at hand, however, is but a very first step towards understanding the political and economic elite's current approach towards labor migration, mapped against voices in the international community.

4. Mapping the Discourse

Qualitative content analysis of the current political discourse on labor migration to Japan has led me to identify the following four actors/actor groups, as central agents in this discourse: The Ministry of Justice is the entity that oversees Japan's Immigration Bureau (*Nyūkoku Kanrikyoku*), and in this role also sees itself as the controlling authority regarding measures and laws regulating immigration to Japan. In contrast, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs aims to bypass the lengthy process of legal revisions by shaping new immigration policies via bilateral agreements with selected states. On another front, Japan's business federation, *Nippon Keidanren*, cites economic need in their aggressive demands for a new framework for labor migration to Japan. Finally, the United Nations, here represented by the United Nations Population Division and the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, draws the attention of government agencies to the hypothetical (but probably inevitable?) numbers of immigrants, and to universal issues such as human rights, which in the context of labor migration might be violated through human trafficking, xenophobia and related offenses.

The current political discourse on labor migration to Japan, shaped by the abovenamed actors, has been the focus of my academic interest over the past months. I argue that two issues have been at the center of this discourse: First, the question of whether labor migration to Japan should be opened to the non-skilled workforce or strictly

regulated to highly/medium skilled persons. Economic interests are bound to clash with what is politically perceived to be the Japanese population’s opinion about this issue, in particular regarding the number of foreign workers to be accepted into Japanese society. The second issue analyzed here is whether the four actors perceive labor migration to Japan as a matter of public (and national) security. Again, political actors shape this issue as a matter of the “public will” and the “public good”. Figure 1 shows the positions of each actor involved in the current political discourse on labor migration to Japan, mapped according to their take on these two issues. The diagram presents this idea in four quadrants, which are divided on the vertical axis by “immigration as a security issue for/not a security issue for Japan” and on the horizontal axis by “exclusively skilled labor migration vs. labor migration including unskilled labor.” Explanations and interpretations of the actors’ positions in these four quadrants follow.

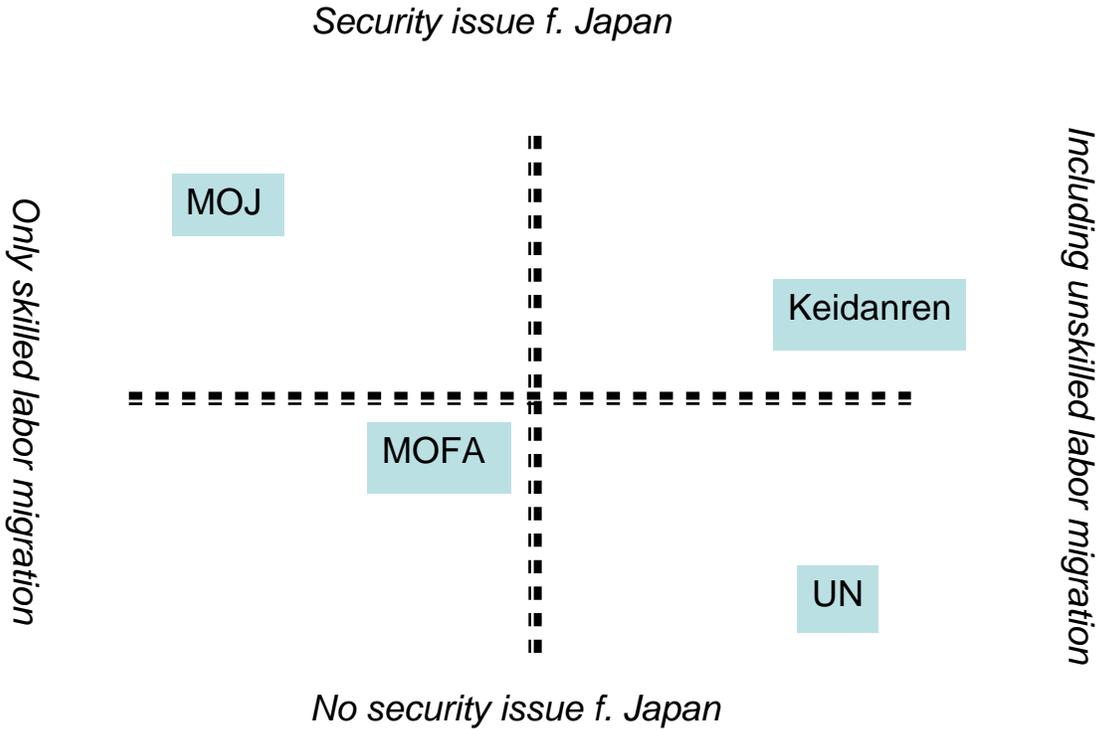


Figure 1: Labor migration to Japan: mapping the discourse

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) is situated in the quadrant marked “only skilled labor migration” and “security issue for Japan.” This positioning reflects the Ministry’s position as advocate of a highly restricted legal framework for labor migration to Japan. In December 2005, only days after the Ministry for Health, Labor and Welfare had issued the latest numbers on the demographic development of Japan’s population, Justice Minister Sugiura Seiken called for an in-house commission to debate whether or not labor migration to Japan was a way to deal with the nation’s shrinking workforce; if labor migration was beneficial to Japan, what form should it take? The chairman of this commission is Senior Vice-Minister of Justice, LDP politician Kōno Tarō. Drawing from a personal interview with Vice-Minister Kōno (2006/02/20, Interview), I shall highlight three aspects MOJ felt it should address with regard to future labor migration to Japan. First, MOJ rejected reforming its most contentious immigration guideline, which excludes all unskilled workers. According to MOJ, vacancies on the Japanese job market which evolve as the result of the nation’s demographic change should be filled by more effectively introducing female workers and youths, especially the ones who have become known under the acronym NEET (not in employment, education or training), into the workforce. Secondly, MOJ toyed with the idea of revising the relatively generous immigration guidelines for *Nikkeijin*, i.e. persons of Japanese descent, meaning the children and grandchildren of former emigrants from Japan. Currently *Nikkeijin* can hold Japanese long-term residency (*teijūsha*) visas, and are thus entitled to an unlimited work permit. This means that *Nikkeijin* can work in Japan even without any special qualifications, making the *teijūsha* visa a de facto loophole for unskilled labor migration to Japan. Thirdly, MOJ announced that it will push for stricter implementation of punishment for visa overstayers and their employers. Of special concern are exchange students (*ryūgakusei* and *shūgakusei*) from China, who – according to MOJ – overstay their student visas in large numbers and find work as undocumented labor.

Already in place at the time of this announcement was a campaign MOJ launched in 2004, the *fuhō shūrō gaikokujin taisaku kyanpēn* (Campaign against illegal work by foreigners). Under this campaign MOJ has provided the general public and employers with information on what a valid alien registration card – mandatory to registered foreigners in Japan – looks like and where on the card to find its holder’s visa status and his/her work permit status, respectively. Pamphlets and posters (Figure 2 provides an example) ready for download from MOJ’s website invite the public to pass on this information which, according to MOJ, can help prevent employment of undocumented foreigners (MOJ 2004a, Internet). Another feature MOJ’s website offers (only in Japanese, not in English) is an online form that invites the public to fill in information about persons they believe may be undocumented foreigners like an “illegal foreign worker” (*fuhō shūrō gaikokujin*) (MOJ 2004b, Internet). The form can be accessed under the URL provided in the reference section as MOJ 2004c, Internet. Information on potential “illegal foreign worker[s]”, which can include the perceived nationality of the person in question, their workplace, working hours etc., can be submitted anonymously. Human rights associations and international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights have harshly criticized the website as discriminatory against foreigners per se.



外国人登録証明書

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上陸許可年月日…日本の空港や海港で上陸許可の証印を受けた日が記載されます。

在留の資格…出入国管理の法令に基づいて外国人がいかなる入国・在留の許可を受けているのかを表しています。

在留期限…日本国内に在留することのできる許可期限を表しています。もしこの期限を越えて引き続き在留している場合は「不法残留」となります。

この登録証明書の切替を行うための申請期日のことです。これは、**在留することができる期限(在留期限)**を意味するものではありません。



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在留の資格なし

就労活動は禁止

外国人登録証明書に表示された「在留の資格なし」とは?

ワンポイント解説

既に在留期限が経過しているにもかかわらず引き続き滞在している不法残留者、あるいは密航や偽造旅券といった不正な手段によって入国した不法入国者など、いわゆる不法滞在の状態にある外国人であっても、外国人登録法に基づき、外国人登録の申請義務が課されており、また、申請により交付された外国人登録証明書は常に携帯する必要があります。この場合、外国人登録証明書上の「在留の資格」欄には、在留の資格が確認されていないことを表すために、大きく赤字で

在留の資格なし

と記載されます。(左の図を参照)

在留の資格が確認されていない場合には、日本国内でいかなる就労活動に従事することもできず、速やかに入国管理局で法律の規定に基づいた手続きを受ける必要があります。

Figure 2: Campaign against illegal employment of foreigners: sample pamphlet
Source: Ministry of Justice (MOJ 2004a, Internet)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), as opposed to MOJ, does acknowledge a need for labor migration in order to compensate for the shrinking national workforce that is resulting from ongoing demographic changes in Japan. MOFA actively creates opportunities for persons of certain professional qualifications and of certain citizenship to come to Japan and work in the country for some limited time. Via the so-called Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA), MOFA has managed to encourage labor migration to Japan, including the medium and/or lower skilled workforce, without going through the

lengthy process of instituting legal reforms. Negotiations on an EPA with the Philippines began in November 2004; it will shortly be signed by representatives of the two countries. Negotiations on an EPA with Thailand began in September 2005; others are in negotiation or have been signed already. The EPAs with the Philippines and Thailand are most important for my argument since they will include chapters specifically on the movement of persons, i.e. on labor migration to Japan. In particular I will highlight chapter 5, the chapter on “movement of natural persons” in the Japan-Philippines EPA (MOFA 2004a, Internet). In its provisional form, excerpted here, it reads as follows:

The Japanese side will allow entry of Filipino candidates for qualified nurses and certified careworkers [...] and will allow them to work, after completing training of Japanese language and others, as preparation for obtaining national licenses [...].

The Japan-Philippine-EPA focuses on allowing qualified nurses and careworkers from the Philippines to find employment in Japan: the agreement thereby addresses a business sector which in the near future will be affected most by demographic changes in Japan. Not only will there most likely be a significant number of vacancies in these professions, but there will also be rising numbers of patients to be taken care of. In other words, the expanding requirements of this job market will have to be met outside the shrinking pool of Japanese workers. In its draft form, the EPA distinguishes between qualified nurses and certified careworkers, with the latter being graduates from four-year universities; the former, graduates from nurses’ colleges or persons with appropriate qualifications and work-experience as nurses. Under the EPA regulations, certified caregivers will be given a work-permit in Japan for up to four years, qualified nurses for up to three years. Applicants in either group will, however, have to pass a Japanese language test before being granted a work-permit. The rather lengthy process of examinations – in terms of language as well as professional qualifications – is shown in Figure 3.

Basic Framework of the hosting scheme of Filipino Nurses and Certified Careworkers

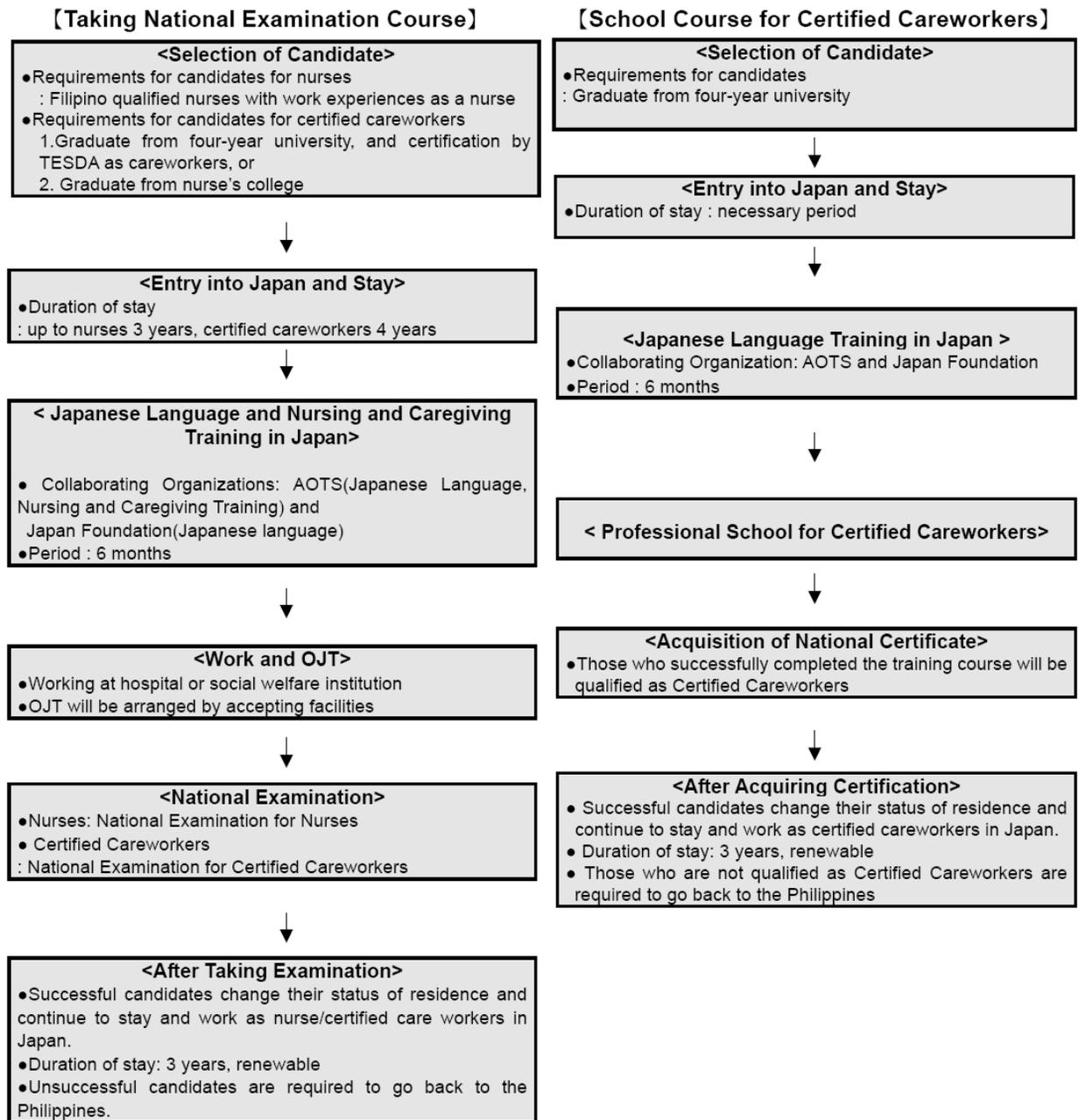


Figure 3: The Japan-Philippines EPA: A system for accepting workers into Japan
Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA 2004b, Internet)

Overall, the qualifications, in particular of the level of Japanese language ability (and bearing in mind the time it will take applicants to meet the requested qualifications), may be asking too much, considering that the work-permits are granted for periods of only three or four years. Nevertheless, the MOFA's EPA initiative definitely opens doors to medium/lower skilled workers to Japan – however narrowly.

Yet another strategy MOFA is pursuing in its effort to encourage labor migration to Japan is hosting academic and public conferences on the issue. It has already co-organized several events with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a Geneva-based civil society organization. One of the latest events co-hosted by MOFA took place in March 2006 at the United Nations University in Tokyo. This full-day conference was entitled *Gaikokujin mondai ni dō taisho subeki ka?* [How should Japan respond to the issue of foreigners? (organizer's official translation)]. The conference's goal was to hear about the German and French experiences of labor migration to their respective countries and on the integration of migrants into their societies. At the conference, Senior Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Shiozaki Yasushisa introduced two aspects of MOFA's current position in this discourse. First, given Japan's demographic changes, MOFA asks for new legal reforms that will create opportunities for medium and/or low skilled as well as unskilled labor migrants to find employment in Japan. Secondly, methods to integrate foreigners into Japanese society urgently need to be developed and realized.

The current discourse on the future of labor migration to Japan is shaped not only by Japan's political elites, but also by members of the business world, such as *Nippon Keidanren* [Japan Business Federation]. For several years now, *Keidanren*, under its chairman Okuda Hiroshi, has been arguing for the internationalization of Japanese business and society. In 2003 it published a paper titled *Japan 2025: Envisioning a Vibrant, Attractive Nation in the Twenty-First Century* (*Nippon Keidanren* 2003b, Internet). This paper draws a picture of *Keidanren's* visions on how Japan's economic policies, societal

structures, and international relations could evolve in order to make Japan a powerful contestant in international competition. Of interest to this paper is *Keidanren*'s vision for Japanese society, which is to be full of "vibrant diversity".

It is not only Japanese citizens who will help bring these choices [i.e. new forms of government, enhanced autonomy, and personal affluence] to our society. Non-Japanese who come to live in this country will bring diverse viewpoints and talents. Japan must create an environment where foreigners can actively participate in economic and social activities. On an individual level this will require greater tolerance toward diversity; on the administrative level, the government must open Japan's doors to people from around the globe so that they can display their ability in this country.

What at first glance reads like enthusiastic support for an open-door labor migration policy is modified in an amendment paper to *Keidanren*'s initial report. In that paper (2003a, Internet), *Keidanren* argues explicitly for four measures that need to be taken in order to help Japan regain "socioeconomic vitality" through internationalization. First, they advocate creating an attractive living and working environment for the international community in Japan. According to *Keidanren* this includes universities and companies providing a more open atmosphere and making their personnel structures more transparent. Equally important is the availability of international schools and medical services in foreign languages. Secondly, the farming and service sectors, the sectors which in the near future will be in need of foreign workers the most, need to be prepared for accepting and integrating this new workforce. Thirdly, a reform of the currently existing visa categories seems necessary, so as to enable more foreign workers to come to Japan and find employment there, in particular those with few or no skills. Also, they advise negotiating further EPAs. *Keidanren*'s fourth and final suggestion for how to achieve a "vibrant, attractive nation in the 21st century" is to create a so-called "Office for Non-Japanese Worker Acceptance", i.e. an administrative body in charge of all matters regarding the life

and work of foreigners in Japan. According to *Keidanren*, transferring these various responsibilities from the numerous government agencies currently in charge, and pooling them under one agency, promises faster and more efficient decision making processes. *Keidanren*, however, also stresses that it is not arguing for an unlimited acceptance of foreign workers into Japanese society; there need to be limits, which are to be set by the requirements of the market.

The position of the United Nations (UN) on labor migration to Japan is represented here by the positions of two UN bodies: the United Nations Population Division, part of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNESA), and the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights (UNHCHR). In 2000, UNESA published a report on replacement migration in eight industrial nations – among them Japan – and two world regions. The report was titled *Replacement Migration: Is it a Solution to Declining and Ageing Populations?* (United Nations Population Division 2000, Internet). This report forecasts how much labor migration e.g. Japan would require to 2050 in order to keep its population at the level of 1995, the forecasted peak (scenario A); to keep its workforce on the 1995 level (scenario B); and to keep the ratio of working to non-working population constant (scenario C). The numerical results for these three scenarios are shown in Table 1.

	Scenario A	Scenario B	Scenario C
Total number of immigrants necessary	17 million	33.5 million	553 million
Number of immigrants necessary per year	381,000	609,000	10 million
Total population in 2050	127 million	150.7 million	818 million
Percentage of immigrants in total population in 2050	17.7%	30%	87%

Table 1: Labor migration to Japan by 2050: shown in three scenarios
Source: Data by United Nations Population Division (2000, Internet)

While it becomes clear that Japan – assuming that the current demographic development continues without change – will need labor migrants in large numbers, it is also obvious that these numbers are way too large to gain political or societal consensus.

While UNESA gives empirical results of how much labor migration Japan would need to meet certain goals, UNHCHR focuses on qualitative research to describe the living environment of foreigners and national minorities in Japan. UNHCHR special rapporteur Doudou Diène, who visited Japan in summer 2005, published his research results in January 2006 in a final report titled *Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and all Forms of Discrimination* (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2006, Internet). The report concludes that there is racism, (racial) discrimination and xenophobia in Japan. It calls upon the Japanese government to acknowledge their existence and to show political will to combat them. Also, a national anti-discrimination law should be passed and implemented; a commission for equality and human rights established. Finally, he asks the Japanese government to revise its policies regarding the writing and teaching of history. The UNHCHR report describes today's Japan as a country unfavorable for national minorities and foreigners to live in: if Japan is to accept border-crossing labor migration, it needs to change its attitude towards foreigners.

The actor analysis of this section explains the reasons for how the current discourse on labor migration to Japan is mapped in Figure 1: MOJ is in the first quadrant with high ratings on both issues, since it explicitly and openly argues for accepting only skilled labor migrants and sees Japan's public security threatened by an increasing number of foreigners living and working in Japan. *Keidanren* also acknowledges that an increase of foreign workers is a security issue for Japan, however to a much lesser degree. The business federation, nevertheless, very pragmatically calls for accepting foreign workers on a market-regulated basis, i.e. unskilled labor migration simply cannot be a taboo issue. *Keidanren* is in the second quadrant; the United Nations in the third. Through statistical

analysis, UNESA shows that Japan will need significant labor migration, including “unskilled” workers, in the near future. According to UNHCHR, the increase in foreign population in Japan is not so much a security issue for Japan, but rather for the migrants themselves. Finally, MOFA is in the fourth quadrant, albeit not far from the point where the two axes cross over. MOFA acknowledges Japan’s need for labor migration and actively promotes it, yet it restricts its engagement to certain professions urgently needed in Japan; at the same time, it puts enormous efforts into integration policies so as not to let labor migration evolve into an issue of public security in Japan.

5. Preliminary Results

This working paper has provided a glimpse into the current political discourse on labor migration to Japan. Four actors: the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), *Nippon Keidanren* (NK), and two bodies of the United Nations (UN) were identified as leading actors in the current discourse. They were introduced along their respective takes on two questions, each of which are central issues in the current discourse: First, is labor migration to Japan to exclude unskilled workers per se? Second, is labor migration to Japan an issue of public security for Japan? The different opinions of the four actors are mapped in Figure 1: MOJ and MOFA stay to one side of the *y* axis, maintaining that labor migration to Japan at this point should be restricted to workers possessing at least some skills – MOFA, however, takes a much more pragmatic approach on the issue than does MOJ. MOFA and the UN find themselves situated on the same side of the *x* axis in their belief that labor migration is not an issue of public security for Japan – it is in fact more of a risk more for the migrants. MOJ and NK, on the other hand, do perceive it as risk factor for the Japanese public. Finally, NK and UN share a common approach in that both argue for the acceptance of unskilled workers to Japan. (Although excluded from this research report, I argue that civil society organizations might share the UN’s position.)

I argue that mapping the current discourse on labor migration to Japan leads to an important, though preliminary, conclusion: The traditional boundaries between political and economical elites on the one side and international organizations and non-state actors on the other are breaking down. New forms of potential coalition building among interest groups are already emerging. Further questions for research may include: How will this new and unprecedented potential for coalition building evolve? What role do civil society organizations play in this process of redefining the structures of interdependence between political actors, especially against the background of a new potential for activism according to the “Boomerang Pattern”? Finally, how will *transmigrants* and the transnationalization of politics shape the political decision-making process with regard to labor migration to Japan?

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